

**Submission
No 39**

OPTIONS FOR ESSENTIAL WORKER HOUSING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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SUBMISSION
TO

**SELECT
COMMITTEE
ON
ESSENTIAL
WORKER
HOUSING**

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INTRODUCTION

Warren Shire Council appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the Select Committee's inquiry into Essential Worker Housing. Warren Shire, located in a semi-remote rural region of New South Wales, is a vibrant community that depends heavily on the dedication and commitment of essential workers. These individuals, including healthcare professionals, educators, emergency responders, and public service providers, form the backbone of our community. Their presence ensures the ongoing provision of critical services that maintain the health, safety, and wellbeing of our residents.

However, Warren Shire faces significant challenges in attracting and retaining these essential workers. The semi-remote nature of our location, coupled with a limited supply of housing, creates barriers that are unique to rural and regional areas. Unlike metropolitan regions, where housing options are more diverse and abundant, Warren Shire struggles with a shortage of affordable and suitable housing. This shortage not only hinders our ability to recruit new essential workers but also threatens the retention of those currently serving our community.

The housing challenges in Warren Shire are further compounded by the broader economic and social conditions that affect rural communities. The local housing market is often constrained by low development activity, limited investment interest, and the higher costs associated with construction in remote areas. Additionally, the existing housing stock is often outdated, insufficiently maintained, or inappropriate for the needs of essential workers who require modern, comfortable, and accessible living conditions.

Given these realities, the need for a targeted and effective approach to Essential Worker Housing is critical.

This submission addresses the stated TERMS OF REFERENCE for the Select Committee on Essential Worker Housing, specifically three key areas:

- the establishment of a clear and practical definition of "Essential Worker Housing";
- the criteria for prioritising worker cohorts and geographical areas; and
- a range of strategies to increase the housing supply for essential workers in regions like Warren Shire.

By focusing on these areas, we aim to highlight the specific needs of our community and propose solutions that will help ensure that essential workers can continue to live and work in Warren Shire.

Warren Shire Council believes that by adopting a comprehensive and regionally sensitive approach to Essential Worker Housing, the NSW Government can make significant strides in addressing the housing challenges faced by rural and regional communities. Our submission is offered with the hope that it will contribute to policies and initiatives that will support the sustainability and growth of Warren Shire, and towns like us, ensuring that essential services remain accessible to all residents, regardless of their location.



Gary Woodman
General Manager
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1 (a) ESTABLISHING AN APPROPRIATE DEFINITION FOR ESSENTIAL WORKER HOUSING

1.(a).1. Context and Importance

In Warren Shire, essential workers are the lifeblood of our community, ensuring that the basic functions and services necessary for daily life are continuously maintained. These workers include healthcare professionals who staff our medical facilities, teachers who educate our children, emergency responders who protect us in times of crisis, and public utilities workers who ensure that essential services like water, electricity, and sanitation are delivered consistently and reliably. Without these individuals, the quality of life in Warren Shire would be significantly compromised, and the overall safety and wellbeing of our residents would be at risk.

Healthcare Workers:

Warren Shire has a small local hospital, and only one medical practice. These organisations are often staffed by a limited number of doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals. These healthcare workers are crucial in providing medical care to residents, many of whom may not have the option to travel to larger urban centres for treatment. In addition to permanent staff, the region also relies on visiting locums and short-term relief staff to fill temporary gaps in coverage and ensure continuous access to medical care. However, the ability to attract and retain both permanent and temporary healthcare professionals is directly impacted by the availability of suitable housing.

If a nurse, doctor, or visiting locum cannot find affordable housing within a reasonable distance of their workplace, they may choose to work elsewhere, leading to staffing shortages that could delay or reduce the availability of critical medical services. This challenge is particularly acute for locums and short-term relief staff, who may be reluctant to accept assignments in the area if adequate and flexible accommodation options are not available. With a high competing demand for their services, professionals have many offers of employment to choose from, and provision of suitable housing, in many cases, is one of the first criteria they consider in choosing the assignments they commit to. Ensuring a consistent supply of healthcare services in Warren Shire, therefore, depends on addressing the housing needs of all healthcare workers, whether they are permanent residents or temporary staff providing essential relief. Small rural towns, where the needs are often the greatest, must be able to compete with other locations by providing the suitable accommodation expected by these workers.

Educators:

Similarly, educators in Warren Shire face challenges due to the limited housing options. Teachers play a pivotal role in the community, especially in rural areas where schools often serve as a central hub for community activities and engagement. The retention of qualified teachers is essential for supporting educational standards and ensuring continuity in student learning. However, without access to affordable and comfortable housing, teachers may be deterred from accepting or continuing positions in Warren Shire, leading to higher turnover rates and potential disruptions in the education system.

Emergency Responders:

Emergency services personnel, such as police officers, firefighters, and paramedics, are also vital to the community. In a semi-remote area like Warren Shire, the prompt response of emergency services can mean the difference between life and death. These workers must be able to live close to their stations or

response units to ensure rapid deployment in emergencies. However, the scarcity of suitable housing within close proximity to their workplaces can pose a significant challenge, potentially delaying emergency response times and putting lives at risk.

Public Utilities Workers:

Moreover, public utilities workers who maintain infrastructure such as water supply, electricity, and waste management are essential for the day-to-day functioning of the community. These roles often require workers to be on-call for emergency repairs or maintenance, necessitating their presence within the community. The lack of affordable housing can make it difficult to retain these workers, leading to disruptions in essential services that the entire community depends on.

Importance of a Clear Definition:

Given the critical nature of these roles, it is imperative that the NSW Government adopts a clear and practical definition of "Essential Worker Housing." This definition must encompass the unique needs of workers in various essential sectors and recognise the challenges posed by semi-remote locations like Warren Shire. A well-defined concept of Essential Worker Housing will serve as the foundation for developing policies and strategies that ensure these workers have access to housing that meets their needs.

Adapting to Local Contexts:

Additionally, the definition must be adaptable to the specific contexts of different regions. In Warren Shire, for instance, the focus might need to be on providing housing that is not only affordable, but also located within close proximity to essential services and workplaces. This is particularly important in a semi-remote area where commuting long distances is often not feasible due to limited public transport options and the geographical spread of the community.

Strategic Importance:

The importance of establishing an appropriate definition cannot be overstated. A clear definition will help guide the allocation of resources, the development of housing policies, and the implementation of targeted initiatives aimed at addressing the housing needs of essential workers in Warren Shire. It will also provide a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of these initiatives and ensuring that they are aligned with the broader goals of supporting regional communities and sustaining essential services.

By clearly defining what constitutes Essential Worker Housing, the NSW Government can create a more targeted and effective approach to housing policy, ensuring that essential workers in Warren Shire and similar communities have access to the housing they need to live and work in the areas where they are most needed. This, in turn, will contribute to the long-term stability and resilience of rural and regional communities across New South Wales.

1.(a).2. Proposed Definition

Warren Shire Council proposes the following definition for "Essential Worker Housing":

Proposed Definition:

Essential Worker Housing refers to safe, affordable, and accessible housing that is specifically designated for workers who perform critical roles in maintaining public health, safety, education, and essential services. This housing is intended to ensure that these essential workers, who are vital to the functioning and wellbeing of the community, can live within reasonable proximity to their workplaces. This category includes, but is not limited to, healthcare professionals, emergency service personnel, educators, public utilities workers, and other government and non-government service providers whose roles are indispensable to the community's sustainability and resilience.

Breaking Down the Definition:

1. "Safe, Affordable, and Accessible":

- **Safe:** Housing provided under this definition must meet the basic standards of safety, ensuring that essential workers are not exposed to health or safety risks. This includes structurally sound buildings, compliance with fire safety regulations, and the availability of emergency services.
- **Affordable:** Affordability is a key aspect, as essential workers often have incomes that do not allow them to compete in high-demand housing markets, particularly in areas experiencing housing shortages or high property prices. The definition stipulates that the cost of housing must be within reach of essential workers, relative to their income levels, to prevent housing insecurity.
- **Accessible:** Accessibility refers to both physical and geographical accessibility. Physically, the housing must accommodate any special needs of workers, such as proximity to healthcare for healthcare workers who may be on-call, or accessible facilities for workers with disabilities. Geographically, it should be situated within a reasonable distance to the worker's place of employment, minimising commute times and ensuring that essential services can be maintained with minimal delay.

2. "Specifically Designated":

- This phrase emphasises that the housing is not just any housing that is incidentally affordable or accessible but is specifically earmarked or reserved for essential workers. This could be achieved through dedicated housing projects, subsidies, or allocation of units in broader housing developments that are reserved exclusively for essential workers. By designating housing for this purpose, the government and relevant authorities can ensure that those who are critical to community services have guaranteed access to housing.

3. "Workers Who Perform Critical Roles":

- This part of the definition highlights the target demographic for Essential Worker Housing. These roles are those that are foundational to the operation of any community, and include, but are not limited to:
 - **Healthcare Professionals:** Including doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, and support staff who provide critical medical care and services.
 - **Emergency Service Personnel:** Such as police officers, firefighters, paramedics, and other first responders who ensure public safety and respond to emergencies.
 - **Educators:** Teachers, school administrators, and support staff who provide education and maintain the learning environment for children and young adults, which is vital for the long-term health and prosperity of the community.
 - **Public Utilities Workers:** Individuals who ensure the delivery and maintenance of essential utilities such as water, electricity, waste management, and telecommunications, all of which are necessary for day-to-day living.

- **Government and Non-Government Service Providers:** This includes social workers, public health officials, and others whose roles are integral to maintaining public services and supporting community wellbeing.
4. **"Indispensable to the Community's Wellbeing and Functionality":**
- The definition underscores the indispensable nature of these roles. Without these workers, communities, particularly those in semi-remote and rural areas like Warren Shire, would struggle to maintain basic services. This phrase reinforces the rationale behind prioritising these workers for housing, recognising that their presence and stability within the community are crucial to its overall functioning and long-term sustainability.

Application of the Definition:

- **Targeted Housing Solutions:** The adoption of this definition would guide the development and allocation of housing resources, ensuring that essential workers are prioritised. This might include the development of new housing projects specifically for these workers, the provision of rental assistance, or the allocation of existing affordable housing units.
- **Policy and Planning:** This definition a clear framework for policymakers and urban planners to use when designing housing strategies. It ensures that the needs of essential workers are explicitly considered in housing policies, zoning decisions, and development approvals.
- **Community Resilience:** By ensuring that essential workers have access to appropriate housing, the community as a whole becomes more resilient. Essential services remain staffed, workers are more likely to stay in the community long-term, and the overall stability and wellbeing of the region are supported.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** Implementing this definition can help address the ongoing housing challenges faced by essential workers, contributing to the long-term sustainability of communities like Warren Shire. It also encourages the retention of essential workers by reducing one of the key barriers they face in semi-remote and rural areas: the lack of affordable and suitable housing.

In summary, Warren Shire Council's proposed definition of "Essential Worker Housing" is designed to address the unique housing needs of those whose work is critical to the functioning of the community. It provides a clear and actionable framework that can guide the development of policies and initiatives aimed at ensuring that essential workers can live and thrive within the communities they serve.

1.(a).3. Criteria for Prioritising Worker Cohorts

To ensure that Essential Worker Housing is allocated to those who most critically need it, Warren Shire Council recommends the following prioritisation criteria. These criteria are designed to address the specific challenges faced by essential workers in rural and semi-remote areas like Warren Shire, where housing shortages and affordability issues are acute.

Role Criticality:

- **Definition and Importance:** Role criticality refers to the essential nature of the work performed by certain cohorts of workers. These are roles that, if left unfilled, would have an immediate and severe impact on the community's ability to function. In the context of Warren Shire, this includes healthcare professionals (such as doctors, nurses, and paramedics), emergency responders (such as police officers, firefighters, and ambulance personnel), and educators (teachers, school administrators, and support staff).
- **Examples:**

- **Healthcare Professionals:** In a rural area like Warren Shire, the availability of healthcare professionals is often limited. Prioritising housing for doctors, nurses, and allied health workers is crucial, as they are the frontline providers of health services. A shortage of these workers could lead to a decline in the quality of healthcare, longer wait times for medical services, and potentially life-threatening situations for residents in need of urgent care.
- **Emergency Responders:** The roles of police officers, firefighters, and paramedics are critical in ensuring public safety. In emergencies, the time taken to respond can make a significant difference in outcomes. By prioritising housing for these workers, Warren Shire can ensure that they are able to live close to their workplaces, thus reducing response times and enhancing community safety.
- **Educators:** Teachers and school staff are essential in providing consistent education and support to students. In Warren Shire, where schools often serve as community hubs, the absence of qualified educators can have far-reaching effects on the community's social fabric and the prospects of its youth.

Service Impact:

- **Definition and Importance:** Service impact refers to the extent to which the absence or shortage of certain essential workers would disrupt critical services. The roles that should be prioritised under this criterion are those where a lack of personnel would lead to significant gaps in service delivery, thereby compromising the health, safety, and overall wellbeing of the community.
- **Examples:**
 - **Public Utilities Workers:** Workers who manage water supply, electricity, waste management, and telecommunications are indispensable for maintaining basic living standards. In Warren Shire, where these services might already be stretched, any reduction in staffing levels could lead to serious disruptions. Prioritising housing for these workers ensures that essential utilities remain operational and that any issues can be addressed promptly.
 - **Social Workers and Public Health Officials:** These workers provide critical support to vulnerable populations, including the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and those facing mental health challenges. A shortage in this workforce could lead to inadequate care and support for these groups, significantly impacting their quality of life.

Regional Necessity:

- **Definition and Importance:** Regional necessity refers to the specific challenges faced by workers in rural and semi-remote areas like Warren Shire, where housing availability and affordability are significant issues. Workers in these regions should be prioritised for housing due to the difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff in areas that are often less attractive to potential workers due to their isolation and the limited amenities available.
- **Examples:**
 - **Recruitment and Retention Challenges:** Warren Shire has historically faced difficulties in attracting and retaining essential workers due to the lack of affordable housing. This is a common challenge in rural areas, where the housing market may not be robust enough to support the influx of new workers. By prioritising these workers for housing, the region can improve its ability to maintain a stable workforce, ensuring that essential services continue uninterrupted.

- **Geographical Isolation:** Workers in semi-remote areas like Warren Shire often have fewer housing options available within a reasonable commuting distance. This isolation can deter potential workers from relocating to the area. Prioritising housing for these workers can help mitigate the impact of geographical isolation and make these regions more attractive to essential workers.

Continuity of Service:

- **Definition and Importance:** Continuity of service refers to the stability and long-term commitment of essential workers to the community. Prioritising housing for workers who are likely to remain in their roles for an extended period can help ensure that the community does not face frequent disruptions in essential services due to high turnover rates.
- **Examples:**
 - **Long-Term Retention:** Essential workers who have demonstrated a commitment to remaining in Warren Shire should be given priority for housing. For example, a healthcare professional who has been serving the community for several years and intends to stay should be prioritised over new recruits. This ensures that the community benefits from the experience and stability that long-term workers provide.
 - **Community Integration:** Workers who are deeply integrated into the community, such as those who participate in local organisations or have family ties in the area, are more likely to stay long-term. Prioritising housing for these individuals not only supports continuity of service, but also strengthens the social fabric of the community.

Summary:

By applying these criteria—Role Criticality, Service Impact, Regional Necessity, and Continuity of Service—Warren Shire Council seeks to ensure that Essential Worker Housing is allocated in a manner that best supports the community’s needs. These criteria recognise the unique challenges faced by essential workers in rural and semi-remote areas and aim to address those challenges by ensuring that housing resources are directed to those who will provide the most significant benefit to the community. This strategic approach to housing allocation will help sustain the delivery of essential services in Warren Shire, thereby enhancing the overall resilience and wellbeing of the region.

1.(a).4. Criteria for Prioritising Geographical Areas

Given the significant disparities between metropolitan and regional areas, Warren Shire Council proposes a targeted approach to prioritising geographical areas for Essential Worker Housing. This approach considers the unique challenges faced by rural and semi-remote communities, where attracting and retaining essential workers is often more difficult due to limited housing options and access to services. The following criteria are recommended to ensure that the most critical areas receive the necessary support:

Service Accessibility:

- **Definition and Importance:** Service accessibility refers to the ease with which residents in a particular area can access essential services such as healthcare, education, emergency services, and public utilities. In regional and rural areas like Warren Shire, these services are often spread thin, with fewer facilities and longer distances between them. Prioritising areas with limited access to essential services is crucial to ensuring that all residents, regardless of location, receive the care and support they need.

- **Examples:**
 - **Healthcare Access:** In Warren Shire, the local hospital and medical practices may be the only healthcare providers within a large geographical area. Prioritising housing for healthcare workers in such regions ensures that these facilities remain operational and accessible to the local population.
 - **Education Services:** Rural schools often serve as both educational institutions and community centres. By prioritising areas where educational facilities are limited, the government can ensure that teachers and support staff are available to maintain educational continuity and support community activities.
 - **Emergency Services:** In semi-remote areas, the response time of emergency services can be critical. Prioritising housing for emergency responders in regions with limited-service accessibility ensures that these workers can live close to their stations, reducing response times and enhancing public safety.

Housing Availability and Affordability:

- **Definition and Importance:** Housing availability and affordability are key factors in determining where essential worker housing should be prioritised. In many rural and semi-remote areas like Warren Shire, the housing market is often limited, with fewer properties available and higher costs relative to income levels. This scarcity of affordable housing can deter essential workers from relocating to these areas, exacerbating workforce shortages.
- **Examples:**
 - **Housing Shortages:** Warren Shire, like many rural regions, may have a limited number of housing units available for rent or purchase. This scarcity can drive up prices, making it difficult for essential workers to find affordable housing. Prioritising areas with acute housing shortages ensures that essential workers have access to the housing they need to live and work in the community.
 - **Affordability Challenges:** Even where housing is available, it may not be affordable for essential workers, particularly those on modest salaries. In areas where housing costs are disproportionately high compared to local wages, prioritising affordable housing solutions for essential workers can help attract and retain the necessary workforce.

Community Dependence:

- **Definition and Importance:** Community dependence refers to the reliance of smaller, isolated communities on a limited number of essential workers to maintain basic services. In these communities, the loss of just one or two key workers can have a profound impact on the availability of essential services, making the prioritisation of housing for these workers critically important.
- **Examples:**
 - **Small Rural Communities:** In a small town within Warren Shire, the local school might be staffed by only a few teachers, or the healthcare clinic might have just one or two practitioners. The departure of any of these essential workers could lead to the closure of services, forcing residents to travel long distances for basic needs. By prioritising housing for these workers, the community's dependence on them is recognised and mitigated.
 - **Isolated Locations:** Communities that are geographically isolated, with limited access to larger urban centres, are particularly vulnerable to disruptions in service. Prioritising housing in these areas ensures that essential workers are available to maintain critical services, despite the challenges posed by isolation.

Strategic Development:

- **Definition and Importance:** Strategic development refers to areas identified by the NSW Government or local councils for growth or development, where the demand for essential services is expected to increase. Prioritising these areas for Essential Worker Housing supports long-term planning objectives and ensures that as communities grow, they are equipped with the necessary workforce to sustain that growth.
- **Examples:**
 - **Planned Growth Areas:** If Warren Shire is identified as a region for strategic growth—perhaps due to new infrastructure projects, economic initiatives, or population expansion—prioritising housing for essential workers in this area would be crucial to supporting that growth. This would ensure that as the population increases, there is a corresponding increase in the availability of essential services.
 - **Economic Development Zones:** In areas where economic development is being actively promoted, such as through the establishment of new industries or businesses, the demand for services like healthcare, education, and public safety will naturally rise. Prioritising housing for essential workers in these zones ensures that the workforce needed to support these developments is readily available.

Summary:

By applying these criteria—Service Accessibility, Housing Availability and Affordability, Community Dependence, and Strategic Development—Warren Shire Council would aim to ensure that Essential Worker Housing is allocated where it is most needed. These criteria recognise the unique challenges faced by rural and semi-remote areas and seek to address the disparities between metropolitan and regional regions. This strategic prioritisation will help ensure that all communities, regardless of size or location, have access to the essential services they need to thrive, supporting the long-term sustainability and resilience of regions like Warren Shire.

1.(b). OPTIONS TO INCREASE HOUSING SUPPLY FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS

Warren Shire's semi-remote location presents unique challenges in attracting and retaining essential workers, primarily due to the limited availability and affordability of suitable housing. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and innovative approach that leverages planning reforms, incentivises private sector involvement, and maximises the use of government-owned land. Below are detailed options that could significantly enhance the housing supply for essential workers in Warren Shire.

1.(b).1. Planning Tools and Reforms

Zoning Flexibility:

- **Explanation:** Zoning regulations are a fundamental aspect of urban planning, dictating how land can be used and developed. In many rural and semi-remote areas like Warren Shire, existing zoning laws are often restrictive, limiting the potential for developing essential worker housing. Zoning flexibility involves revising these regulations to allow for more diverse and innovative uses of land, particularly for developments that cater to the specific needs of essential workers.
- **Expanded Detail:**
 - **Mixed-Use Developments:** Introducing zoning reforms that encourage mixed-use developments is a key strategy. Mixed-use developments combine residential, commercial, and sometimes industrial uses within a single project, creating vibrant, multi-functional spaces. For essential worker housing, this could mean integrating residential units with healthcare clinics, educational facilities, or retail spaces, thereby providing essential workers with convenient access to services. For instance, a development could include apartments for healthcare workers situated above a ground-floor medical centre, ensuring proximity to work and reducing commute times.
 - **Adaptive Reuse of Underutilised Properties:** Zoning reforms could also facilitate the adaptive reuse of underutilised properties. For example, vacant schools, industrial sites, or obsolete government buildings could be repurposed into housing units for essential workers. This approach not only addresses housing shortages, but also revitalises dormant properties, contributing to the overall economic development of Warren Shire. This could include easing restrictions on building heights, lot sizes, or the number of units allowed on a given property to encourage the redevelopment of underused land.

Streamlined Approvals:

- **Explanation:** The approval process for new housing developments can be cumbersome and time-consuming, particularly in rural areas where bureaucratic procedures may not be well-aligned with the urgency of housing needs. Streamlining the approval process is essential to accelerating the development of essential worker housing, reducing the time and cost associated with getting projects off the ground.
- **Expanded Detail:**
 - **Priority Processing for Essential Worker Housing:** Implementing a priority processing system for essential worker housing projects can significantly reduce delays. This would involve creating a separate, expedited pathway for projects that meet specific criteria related to essential worker housing. For instance, developments that provide a certain percentage of units for essential workers or that are in high-need areas could be fast-tracked through the approval process, bypassing some of the more time-consuming steps

such as extensive environmental impact assessments, provided they meet predefined sustainability criteria.

- **Pre-Approved Building Designs and Plans:** Another strategy could involve the development of pre-approved building designs and plans that align with local regulations and meet essential worker housing needs. These designs could be offered to developers to bypass lengthy design review processes. By selecting from a set of pre-approved designs, developers can reduce the time spent on securing building permits, allowing construction to begin more quickly. Additionally, this approach ensures that housing projects maintain a consistent standard of quality and efficiency, tailored to the specific needs of Warren Shire's essential workers.

1.(b).2. Incentives for Development on Privately Owned Land

Tax Incentives:

- **Explanation:** Tax incentives are a powerful tool to encourage private sector participation in the development of essential worker housing. By offering financial benefits such as tax breaks or rebates, the government can make it more attractive for private developers to invest in projects that serve the public good, particularly in areas where the financial returns might otherwise be insufficient to justify the investment.
- **Expanded Detail:**
 - **Land Tax Reductions:** One of the most effective tax incentives is a reduction in land tax for properties developed specifically for essential worker housing. For instance, developers who dedicate a portion of their projects to affordable housing for essential workers could receive significant land tax discounts. This would reduce the ongoing financial burden on developers, making it easier for them to offer lower rents or sell units at below-market rates.
 - **Stamp Duty Rebates:** Offering stamp duty rebates to developers and homebuyers involved in essential worker housing projects could further incentivise participation. For developers, a rebate on the stamp duty payable on land purchases used for essential worker housing could lower initial costs, encouraging more investment. For essential workers purchasing homes, a rebate on their stamp duty could make home ownership more attainable, thereby improving retention rates for these critical workers.
 - **Depreciation Allowances:** Enhanced depreciation allowances on capital expenditure related to essential worker housing could also be considered. This would allow developers to write off construction costs over a shorter period, improving cash flow and the overall financial viability of projects.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):

- **Explanation:** Public-private partnerships leverage the strengths of both the public and private sectors to deliver essential infrastructure and services. In the context of essential worker housing, PPPs can be an effective way to pool resources, share risks, and ensure that housing projects meet both public needs and private financial requirements.
- **Expanded Detail:**
 - **Co-Investment Models:** Under a co-investment model, the government could partner with private developers to co-fund the construction of essential worker housing. The government's contribution might include providing land, financing infrastructure (such as roads and utilities), or offering financial incentives such as grants or low-interest loans. In return, the developer would be responsible for constructing and maintaining the housing units, with profits shared between the public and private entities based on their

respective investments. This model helps distribute financial risk, making it more appealing for private developers to engage in projects that might otherwise be seen as too risky or unprofitable.

- **Government Guarantees:** The government could provide guarantees on loans taken out by developers to finance essential worker housing projects. By mitigating the financial risk, these guarantees would make it easier for developers to secure financing at favourable terms, thereby reducing the overall cost of development. This could be particularly important in semi-remote areas like Warren Shire, where the perceived financial risks might otherwise deter investment.

1.(b).3. Opportunities within Developments on Government-Owned Land

Dedicated Essential Worker Housing:

- **Explanation:** Government-owned land represents a valuable resource that can be strategically used to address housing shortages for essential workers. By designating specific parcels of this land for the development of essential worker housing, the government can directly influence the availability and affordability of housing in areas where it is most needed.
- **Expanded Detail:**
 - **Repurposing Existing Government Facilities:** There may be opportunities to repurpose existing government-owned buildings, such as old schools, unused administrative buildings, or even decommissioned military facilities, into housing for essential workers. These properties can often be converted at a lower cost compared to new construction, particularly if they are structurally sound and located in areas with existing infrastructure. For example, an unused government office complex in Warren Shire could be renovated into apartments for healthcare workers and teachers, providing much-needed housing without the need for new land acquisition or extensive new infrastructure development.
 - **New Housing Developments on Government Land:** The government could also proactively develop new housing projects on vacant or underutilised land it owns. These developments could be designed with essential workers in mind, featuring a mix of housing types to accommodate different needs—from single professionals to families. By controlling the land and development process, the government can ensure that these housing units are offered at below-market rates, either for rent or purchase, helping to attract and retain essential workers in Warren Shire.

Incentive-Based Land Leases:

- **Explanation:** Offering long-term, low-cost leases on government land can significantly reduce the financial burden on developers, making it easier to build affordable housing for essential workers. These leases could be structured to provide additional incentives, such as deferred payments or performance-based rent reductions, which would further enhance the financial feasibility of such projects.
- **Expanded Detail:**
 - **Discounted Lease Rates:** The government could offer land leases at substantially reduced rates to developers who commit to building and maintaining essential worker housing. For instance, a developer could lease land at a fraction of the market rate, with the condition that a certain percentage of the housing units be reserved for essential workers. This would lower the initial capital requirements, enabling the developer to pass on the savings to tenants in the form of lower rents.

- **Deferred Lease Payments:** To further incentivise development, the government could offer deferred payment terms on land leases. For example, a developer might not have to begin paying lease fees until after the housing units are completed and occupied. This would allow the developer to focus financial resources on construction and reduce the upfront financial burden, making it more feasible to complete projects in regions like Warren Shire where traditional financing might be harder to secure.

1.(b).4. Investigating Reforms that Promote Fiscal Sustainability, Innovation, and Essential Worker Housing In-Perpetuity

Community Land Trusts (CLTs):

- **Explanation:** Community Land Trusts (CLTs) are a model of land ownership and housing provision that can ensure long-term affordability and community control. In a CLT, the land is owned by a non-profit trust that leases it to individuals or organisations for the development of housing. The homes themselves can be sold or rented, but the land remains in the trust, which helps keep housing costs low and prevents market pressures from driving up prices.
- **Expanded Detail:**
 - **Establishing a CLT in Warren Shire:** A CLT could be established in Warren Shire to acquire and manage land specifically for essential worker housing. The trust could be funded through a combination of government grants, charitable donations, and community investments. The CLT would then lease the land to developers or housing associations at nominal rates, ensuring that the housing built on the land remains affordable in perpetuity. This model is particularly effective in protecting the long-term affordability of housing, as the land is removed from the speculative market, preventing future price increases that could displace essential workers.
 - **Long-Term Community Benefits:** In addition to providing affordable housing, a CLT can offer other community benefits. For example, the trust could develop community gardens, recreational spaces, or shared facilities on the land, enhancing the overall quality of life for residents. By keeping control of the land within the community, a CLT also helps ensure that development aligns with local needs and priorities, fostering greater community engagement and resilience.

Innovative Construction Techniques:

- **Explanation:** In regions like Warren Shire, where traditional construction methods can be costly and logistically challenging, innovative construction techniques such as modular and prefabricated housing offer a promising alternative. These methods are often faster and more cost-effective, making them well-suited to the needs of semi-remote areas.
- **Expanded Detail:**
 - **Modular Housing:** Modular housing involves the construction of individual sections, or modules, in a factory setting, which are then transported to the site and assembled into a complete structure. This approach can significantly reduce construction time and costs, as modules are built in controlled environments where weather delays and Labor shortages are less of a concern. For essential worker housing, modular units could be customised to meet specific needs, such as providing on-site accommodation for healthcare workers near a hospital or creating compact, energy-efficient homes for teachers and their families.
 - **Prefabricated Homes:** Similar to modular housing, prefabricated homes are constructed off-site and transported to their final location. Prefabricated homes can range from

single-family residences to larger multi-unit buildings. The speed and efficiency of prefabricated construction make it an ideal solution for quickly addressing housing shortages in semi-remote areas. Additionally, prefabricated homes can be designed to meet high standards of energy efficiency and sustainability, reducing long-term operational costs for residents and aligning with broader environmental goals.

Sustainable Financing Models:

- **Explanation:** Ensuring the long-term sustainability of essential worker housing projects requires innovative financing models that can provide ongoing support and reinvestment. These models could include revolving loan funds, social impact bonds, or other financial instruments designed to create a self-sustaining cycle of development.
- **Expanded Detail:**
 - **Revolving Loan Funds:** A revolving loan fund could be established to provide low-interest loans to developers or housing associations building essential worker housing. As these loans are repaid, the funds are reinvested into new projects, creating a continuous supply of capital for housing development. This model not only helps finance initial construction, but also ensures that funds remain available for future projects, supporting the ongoing expansion of the essential worker housing stock in Warren Shire.
 - **Social Impact Bonds (SIBs):** Social impact bonds are a relatively new financing mechanism where private investors provide upfront capital for social projects, such as essential worker housing, and the government repays the investment based on the achievement of predetermined outcomes. For instance, an SIB could be structured to fund the construction of affordable housing units, with repayments tied to the number of units occupied by essential workers or the overall reduction in housing costs. This approach aligns financial returns with social outcomes, incentivising private investment in projects that deliver measurable benefits to the community.

1.(b).5. Other Related Matters

Access to Services and Infrastructure:

- **Explanation:** The success of essential worker housing developments depends not only on the availability of affordable housing, but also on the proximity and accessibility of essential services and infrastructure. In semi-remote areas like Warren Shire, additional investment in infrastructure may be required to support new housing developments and ensure that they are viable in the long term.
- **Expanded Detail:**
 - **Infrastructure Development:** To support essential worker housing, the government may need to invest in upgrading or expanding local infrastructure. This could include building new roads to connect housing developments with major transportation routes, expanding public transport networks to reduce reliance on private vehicles, and ensuring reliable access to utilities such as water, electricity, and broadband internet. In some cases, it may also involve constructing or upgrading community facilities, such as schools, healthcare centres, and recreational spaces, to make the area more attractive to potential residents.
 - **Proximity to Services:** Ensuring that essential worker housing is located near key services is critical to reducing travel times and improving the quality of life for residents. For example, housing developments could be strategically placed near schools, hospitals, or emergency service stations, minimising the distance that essential workers need to travel to reach their workplaces. In more remote parts of Warren Shire, this might require the

co-location of housing and services, such as building teacher housing adjacent to a rural school or providing accommodation for healthcare workers within hospital grounds.

Community Integration:

- **Explanation:** Essential worker housing should be designed not only to meet the practical needs of residents, but also to integrate them into the broader community. This involves creating housing developments that are inclusive and well-connected to the surrounding area, rather than isolating essential workers in separate or distant locations.
- **Expanded Detail:**
 - **Mixed-Use and Inclusive Developments:** One approach to fostering community integration is to design mixed-use developments that include both essential worker housing and other types of residential, commercial, and community spaces. For example, a new housing project could feature a mix of affordable units for essential workers, market-rate apartments, retail shops, and community centres. This would create a more diverse and vibrant community, where essential workers live alongside other residents and have easy access to amenities and social activities.
 - **Creating a Sense of Belonging:** Housing developments should be designed to foster a sense of community and belonging among residents. This could involve incorporating shared spaces such as gardens, playgrounds, or community rooms where residents can gather and interact. Additionally, involving residents in the planning and design process can help ensure that the development reflects their needs and preferences, leading to stronger community ties and greater satisfaction with the living environment.
 - **Connectivity and Mobility:** Ensuring that essential worker housing developments are well-connected to the rest of the community is also important for integration. This could involve designing pedestrian-friendly streets, providing safe cycling routes, and ensuring access to public transport. For more remote developments, it might also include the provision of shuttle services or car-sharing programs to help residents reach other parts of the community without relying on private vehicles.

In summary, addressing the housing needs of essential workers in Warren Shire requires a comprehensive approach that leverages zoning reforms, public and private investment, innovative construction techniques, and sustainable financing models. By implementing these strategies, the government can create a robust supply of affordable, high-quality housing that supports the retention and wellbeing of essential workers, ultimately contributing to the long-term sustainability and resilience of the community.

2.0 INCORPORATING NSW GOVERNMENT'S **CENTRAL WEST AND ORANA REGIONAL PLAN 2041** – OBJECTIVE 16: PROVIDING ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS FOR SEASONAL, TEMPORARY, AND KEY WORKERS

As the General Manager of Warren Shire Council, I recognise the critical importance of aligning our local housing strategies with broader regional planning initiatives. *The Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2041*, particularly Objective 16, (extract attached as Annexure 1), provides a strategic framework for addressing the unique challenges associated with accommodating seasonal, temporary, and key workers in our region. This objective is especially pertinent given the anticipated influx of workers related to significant capital projects planned over the next five years, and it is essential that Warren Shire positions itself to meet these demands effectively.

Understanding the Regional Context

Based on the *Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2041*, the Central West and Orana region is poised for a period of unprecedented growth, driven by over \$12.6 billion in planned investments. These investments encompass a wide range of major infrastructure projects, including the Parkes Special Activation Precinct (SAP), Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), Inland Rail, health and road improvements, and associated infrastructure developments. Such large-scale projects will require a significant workforce, much of which will be temporary or seasonal.

For Warren Shire, these developments present both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the influx of temporary workers can stimulate the local economy by increasing demand for goods and services, potentially leading to new business opportunities and greater economic diversity. On the other hand, the surge in demand for short-term accommodation can strain the local housing market, potentially driving up prices and limiting availability for permanent residents, including essential workers.

Strategic Alignment with Objective 16

Objective 16 of the *Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2041* focuses on ensuring that there are adequate accommodation options for seasonal, temporary, and key workers. Warren Shire Council recognises that meeting this objective is crucial to maintaining the balance between economic growth and community wellbeing. To this end, the Council is committed to implementing the strategies outlined in the regional plan, ensuring that our local planning frameworks are both flexible and robust enough to accommodate the projected workforce needs.

2.1. Planning for Short-Term Accommodation Needs:

Warren Shire is likely to experience increased demand for short-term accommodation due to its proximity to several of the region's major infrastructure projects. This demand will be driven by construction workers, engineers, and other specialists who will be working on these projects. The Council will need to proactively plan for this influx, ensuring that there is a variety of accommodation options available, including caravan parks, manufactured home estates, tiny homes, and other flexible housing solutions.

- **Zoning and Land Use Flexibility:** To facilitate the development of appropriate short-term accommodations, Warren Shire Council could review and amend local environmental plans (LEPs)

to allow for greater flexibility in zoning and land use. This could include permitting temporary accommodation on land that is currently zoned for other uses or designating specific areas within or adjacent to town centres for the development of worker accommodation facilities. Additionally, the Council could explore the potential for using publicly owned land for these purposes, ensuring that developments are well-integrated with existing infrastructure and services.

- **Temporary Housing Solutions:** As the demand for worker accommodation fluctuates with the lifecycle of these major projects, it is vital to consider the adaptability of housing solutions. Warren Shire Council may encourage the development of temporary housing that can be repurposed after the completion of these projects. For example, modular housing units or temporary worker camps could be converted into affordable housing for local residents or tourist accommodation, providing long-term benefits to the community even after the temporary workforce has departed.

2.2. Managing Impacts on the Local Housing Market:

The influx of temporary workers can significantly impact local housing markets, particularly in smaller, rural communities like Warren Shire. To mitigate these impacts, it is essential to develop and implement strategies that balance the needs of temporary workers with those of permanent residents.

- **Workforce Accommodation Strategy:** For large-scale projects, Warren Shire Council might require developers to submit a comprehensive workforce accommodation strategy as part of the development application process. This strategy should assess the anticipated impact on the local housing market, including cumulative effects from other concurrent projects, and demonstrate how the project will provide adequate accommodation for its workers without negatively affecting housing availability and affordability for local residents.
- **Supporting Local Housing Supply:** The workforce accommodation strategy should also outline how the project will contribute to the local housing supply. This might involve the construction of new housing units that can be integrated into the local community after the project ends, or the provision of financial support for local housing initiatives. The Council would work closely with developers to ensure that these contributions are aligned with the long-term needs of the community.

2.3. Enhancing Infrastructure to Support Worker Accommodation:

The success of temporary worker accommodation initiatives depends on the availability of supporting infrastructure, such as transport links, utilities, and community services. Warren Shire Council is committed to working towards ensuring that infrastructure development keeps pace with the needs of both temporary workers and the permanent population.

- **Infrastructure Capacity Assessment:** Before approving large-scale developments, the Council would conduct thorough assessments of existing infrastructure capacity. This will include evaluating the ability of local roads, utilities, and public services to support an increased population, particularly during peak construction periods. Where necessary, the Council will advocate for state and federal funding to upgrade infrastructure to meet these demands.
- **Integrated Planning with Regional Stakeholders:** Warren Shire Council will collaborate with neighbouring councils, state agencies, and other stakeholders to develop a coordinated approach to infrastructure planning. This will ensure that infrastructure investments are strategically targeted and that resources are pooled where appropriate to maximise their impact.

2.4. Ensuring Long-Term Economic and Social Benefits:

While the primary focus of Objective 16 is on meeting the immediate accommodation needs of temporary workers, it is equally important to consider the long-term legacy of these developments. Warren Shire Council is committed to working towards leveraging the economic and social opportunities presented by these projects to foster sustainable growth and community resilience.

- **Legacy Infrastructure and Housing:** The Council would encourage the development of worker accommodation that can be easily repurposed for other uses, such as affordable housing, tourism accommodation, or community facilities. This approach ensures that the investments made during the construction phase continue to benefit the community long after the projects are completed.
- **Reducing Pressure on Social and Affordable Housing:** By proactively planning for the accommodation of temporary workers, Warren Shire Council can help reduce the pressure on existing social and affordable housing stock. This will ensure that these resources remain available for those who need them most, including low-income families, elderly residents, and people with disabilities.

2.5. Strategic Collaboration and Planning:

Warren Shire Council recognises that successfully implementing Objective 16 requires a coordinated approach involving multiple levels of government, as well as collaboration with the private sector and local communities.

- **Collaboration with State and Federal Agencies:** The Council will actively engage with the NSW Department of Planning and Environment, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and other relevant agencies to ensure that our local strategies are aligned with state and federal policies. This will include participating in regional planning initiatives, sharing data and insights, and advocating for policies that support the unique needs of rural and semi-remote communities.
- **Monitoring and Adaptation:** The Council may implement mechanisms for monitoring the impact of worker accommodation strategies over the life of major projects. This will allow for adjustments to be made as needed to address emerging challenges or to capitalise on new opportunities. Regular reviews of local planning instruments and housing policies will ensure that Warren Shire remains responsive to the changing needs of its population.

Summary:

Objective 16 of the *Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2041* presents a clear and actionable framework for addressing the accommodation needs of seasonal, temporary, and key workers in the region. Warren Shire Council is committed to integrating this objective into our local planning processes, ensuring that we are prepared to meet the challenges and opportunities associated with the region's significant upcoming infrastructure projects.

By implementing flexible zoning regulations, encouraging innovative housing solutions, and collaborating with regional stakeholders, Warren Shire can not only accommodate the influx of temporary workers but also leverage this opportunity to create lasting benefits for our community. This approach will help ensure that Warren Shire remains a vibrant, resilient, and attractive place to live and work, both during and after the completion of these transformative projects.

3.0. CHALLENGES FACING WARREN SHIRE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ESSENTIAL WORKER HOUSING

While Warren Shire Council is a proactive and committed supporter of development projects, the unique challenges facing small rural communities such as ours present significant obstacles to the realisation of essential worker housing. As one of the few local councils that actively engage as both a facilitator and primary developer for many local projects, Warren Shire plays a critical role in addressing housing shortages. However, as a small council with limited financial and operational resources, our ability to single-handedly drive the large-scale developments needed to accommodate essential workers is constrained.

Limited Financial Resources and Capacity for Upfront Investment:

Unlike larger metropolitan councils with robust financial reserves, Warren Shire lacks the substantial resources required to fund major development projects independently. Essential worker housing, particularly when addressing the needs of healthcare professionals, educators, emergency responders, and public service providers, often requires significant upfront capital investment for land acquisition, infrastructure upgrades, and construction. The scale and complexity of these projects—especially those involving long-term affordability and sustainability—demand financial commitments far beyond the reach of a small rural council.

Warren Shire, while highly proactive in development, simply does not have the financial capacity to provide the initial capital required to kickstart these projects. This leaves the Council reliant on external funding sources, including government grants, financial assistance programs, and partnerships with private sector developers. Without such support, the Council's ability to launch essential worker housing developments is severely hampered, despite the pressing need for such housing in our community.

Dependence on State and Federal Funding:

For Warren Shire Council to proceed with essential worker housing projects, it must seek grant support and financial assistance from state and federal government programs. Many of these programs are competitive, and securing funding requires significant effort in terms of application processes, compliance with specific criteria, and ongoing reporting. This dependency on external funding creates uncertainty and delays in the initiation of projects, as the Council cannot move forward without the assurance of financial backing.

Grant support from programs aimed at addressing rural housing shortages, promoting regional economic development, or supporting infrastructure upgrades is critical for Warren Shire. However, the availability and size of these grants often fluctuate, and they may not cover the full scope of the projects needed to address the housing challenges in a timely manner. Furthermore, while state and federal funding is essential, these programs typically require co-funding or matching contributions from the local council, which poses additional financial burdens on Warren Shire.

Role as a Primary Developer in a Small Community:

In larger municipalities, private sector developers are often the driving force behind new housing projects. However, in small rural communities like Warren Shire, private sector interest in development is often limited due to perceived lower profitability and higher risks associated with rural markets. This leaves Warren Shire Council in the position of acting as the main developer for essential worker housing projects.

Taking on this role involves not only financial responsibility but also the capacity to manage complex planning, design, and construction processes. For a small council, these tasks can strain already limited resources, including staff expertise, administrative capacity, and project management capabilities. Without the backing of larger developers or significant external support, the Council must navigate these challenges independently, adding layers of difficulty to already ambitious projects.

Challenges of Infrastructure and Service Delivery:

In rural and semi-remote areas like Warren Shire, the lack of existing infrastructure—such as transport links, utilities, and essential services—adds another layer of complexity to the development of essential worker housing. Even if housing units are built, they must be supported by adequate infrastructure to ensure that they are viable in the long term. For instance, healthcare workers require housing near well-equipped hospitals and clinics, while educators need access to schools and childcare facilities.

The cost of upgrading or extending infrastructure to support new housing developments is substantial, and once again, Warren Shire Council faces the challenge of covering these costs with limited financial resources. Without external funding or significant government assistance, infrastructure deficits could delay or prevent the successful completion of housing projects, undermining the Council's efforts to address the region's critical housing needs.

Impact on Long-Term Housing Sustainability:

Warren Shire Council is committed to ensuring that essential worker housing projects contribute to the long-term sustainability and affordability of housing in the region. However, the Council's reliance on grants and external funding to initiate these projects may limit its ability to implement innovative financing models, such as Community Land Trusts or revolving loan funds, that ensure long-term affordability. Additionally, the need to constantly seek external funding creates uncertainty about the future availability of resources, which complicates long-term planning and investment strategies.

The Council's proactive stance on development ensures that we are ready and willing to take the lead on these projects, but to achieve long-term housing sustainability, continued support from state and federal governments, as well as collaboration with private sector stakeholders, will be crucial. This support would enable Warren Shire to develop housing solutions that not only address immediate needs but also ensure affordability and stability for essential workers well into the future.

Summary:

Warren Shire Council is deeply committed to addressing the housing needs of essential workers in our community. However, the limitations posed by our size, financial capacity, and rural location present significant challenges to the development of essential worker housing. The Council's ability to act as a primary developer is constrained by its dependence on external funding and the high upfront costs associated with large-scale projects.

To overcome these barriers, Warren Shire Council requires robust grant support and financial assistance from state and federal governments, alongside collaboration with private sector developers. By working together and ensuring that resources are directed to rural councils like ours, we can ensure that Warren Shire remains an attractive and viable place for essential workers to live and contribute to the long-term health and prosperity of our community.

4.0 SUBMISSION CONCLUSION

Warren Shire Council's submission to the Select Committee on Essential Worker Housing underscores the urgent need for tailored solutions to address the unique challenges faced by rural and semi-remote communities like ours. Essential workers—those who provide healthcare, education, emergency services, and other critical functions—are the backbone of our community. Their ability to live and work in Warren Shire is not just a matter of convenience, but one of community survival and resilience.

Throughout this submission, we have articulated a comprehensive approach to defining Essential Worker Housing, establishing criteria for prioritising worker cohorts and geographical areas, and proposing innovative strategies to increase the housing supply for these critical workers. The recommendations put forth are grounded in the specific realities of rural living, where limited housing availability, affordability challenges, and geographical isolation can severely hinder the recruitment and retention of essential workers.

3.1. Establishing a Clear Definition of Essential Worker Housing:

Warren Shire Council emphasises the importance of adopting a clear and practical definition of Essential Worker Housing. This definition must reflect the critical roles these workers play in maintaining public health, safety, education, and essential services. By ensuring that housing designated for essential workers is safe, affordable, and accessible, we can create the foundation for policies that meet the real needs of those who are indispensable to our community's wellbeing. A well-defined concept of Essential Worker Housing will guide the allocation of resources, inform zoning and planning decisions, and provide a framework for evaluating the success of housing initiatives aimed at supporting essential workers.

3.2. Criteria for Prioritising Worker Cohorts and Geographical Areas:

In rural and semi-remote regions like Warren Shire, the prioritisation of essential worker housing must be guided by clear and regionally sensitive criteria. We have proposed prioritisation based on the criticality of the worker's role, the impact of their service on the community, the regional necessity due to recruitment and retention challenges, and the continuity of service that these workers provide. Similarly, the geographical prioritisation must consider factors such as service accessibility, housing availability and affordability, community dependence on essential services, and the strategic development potential of the area. By focusing on these criteria, we can ensure that housing efforts are directed where they will have the greatest impact, supporting the long-term sustainability of essential services in Warren Shire.

3.3. Expanding Housing Supply through Innovative Solutions:

Addressing the housing needs of essential workers in Warren Shire requires more than traditional approaches; it demands innovative solutions tailored to the specific challenges of our region. The Council has proposed a range of strategies to expand the housing supply, including:

- **Zoning Flexibility and Streamlined Approvals:** These reforms would enable the development of mixed-use projects and the repurposing of underutilised properties, making it easier and faster to bring essential worker housing projects to fruition.
- **Incentives for Private Development:** Tax incentives, public-private partnerships, and co-investment models are critical to encouraging private sector participation in the development of essential worker housing. These incentives make it financially viable for developers to invest in areas where the market alone might not support such projects.

- **Utilising Government-Owned Land:** By dedicating government land for essential worker housing and offering incentive-based leases, the Council can ensure that affordable housing is developed in strategic locations, reducing the financial barriers that often hinder such projects.
- **Promoting Fiscal Sustainability and Innovation:** Sustainable financing models like revolving loan funds and social impact bonds, along with innovative construction techniques such as modular and prefabricated housing, are essential to ensuring that housing projects are both financially viable and capable of meeting the unique needs of semi-remote communities.

3.4. Addressing Related Infrastructure and Community Integration:

The success of essential worker housing initiatives also depends on the broader context in which these homes are developed. It is not enough to simply provide housing; these developments must be well-integrated into the community, with access to necessary infrastructure and services. Investment in roads, public transport, schools, and healthcare facilities is crucial to making these housing projects viable in the long term. Further, the design of housing developments should promote community integration, creating inclusive, vibrant neighbourhoods where essential workers are fully embedded in the social fabric of Warren Shire.

5.0. FINAL THOUGHTS:

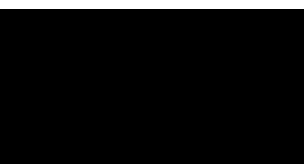
Warren Shire Council's submission outlines a comprehensive and forward-thinking approach to addressing the critical housing needs of essential workers in rural and semi-remote areas. The strategies we have proposed are not just solutions to an immediate problem but a blueprint for sustainable community development. These recommendations are designed to ensure that essential workers—those who provide healthcare, education, emergency services, and other vital functions—have access to safe, affordable, and accessible housing, which is crucial for their retention and well-being.

The NSW Government's adoption of these strategies can make a transformative impact on communities like Warren Shire. By implementing flexible zoning laws, incentivising private sector participation, utilising government-owned land for dedicated worker housing, and embracing innovative construction and financing models, we can address the housing shortages that threaten the sustainability of our essential services. These measures will not only help to attract and retain the workforce that is vital to our region's survival and prosperity but will also contribute to the long-term resilience and growth of Warren Shire. We recognise that the successful implementation of these recommendations requires a collaborative effort between local councils, state and federal governments, and the private sector. It will necessitate a shared commitment to addressing the unique challenges faced by rural and semi-remote communities, and a willingness to invest in the infrastructure, services, and housing that our essential workers need. However, we are confident that with the right support and dedication, these strategies can be brought to life, creating a more resilient, sustainable, and thriving Warren Shire.

In conclusion, Warren Shire Council deeply appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. We stand ready to work alongside the NSW Government and other stakeholders to ensure that our community remains a place where essential workers are not only valued but are also provided with the stability and security they need to continue their indispensable work. Our commitment is to a future where Warren Shire is recognised as a leader in supporting essential workers, and where our community thrives because of the strong foundation that these workers help to build.

Warren Shire Council looks forward to seeing recommendations put into action and to continuing our collaboration with all levels of government to ensure the success of this vital initiative. Together, we can make Warren Shire a model of sustainable development, where essential workers are empowered to serve our community with excellence, now and into the future.

This submission is made in the interest of supporting the sustainability and growth of Warren Shire by ensuring that essential workers are adequately housed and supported in our community.



Gary Woodman
General Manager
Warren Shire Council

ANNEXURE 1 –

EXTRACT FROM THE NSW GOVERNMENT'S *CENTRAL WEST AND ORANA REGIONAL PLAN 2041*

Pages 79 and 80

OBJECTIVE 16: PROVIDE ACCOMODATION OPTIONS FOR SEASONAL, TEMPORARY, AND KEY WORKERS

OBJECTIVE 16:

Provide accommodation options for seasonal, temporary and key workers

Many areas experience high demand for short-term accommodation due to the construction of large-scale infrastructure, renewable energy and mining projects as well as seasonal agricultural employment.

Over the next 5 years, the region has more than \$12.6 billion of planned investment in major capital projects²¹ which will support a significant number of construction-related jobs and flow on employment benefits elsewhere in the region. This includes the Parkes SAP, Central-West Orana REZ, Inland Rail, health and road improvements and associated infrastructure. Where centres plan for an influx of temporary workers, economic stimulus for the area and a range of other opportunities can be provided. Encouraging, and planning for temporary workers accommodation to respond to the region's needs assists with economic value capture.

The demand for and supply of temporary worker accommodation impacts local housing markets and tourism accommodation. Since 2016, there has been a rapid growth in Short-Term Rental Accommodation (STRA) in the region, catering primarily to tourists and providing accommodation for seasonal or temporary workers. Ensuring adequate accommodation is available for residents, workers and the tourism industry is a priority for councils. To help understand the demand, NSW Government has implemented a statewide regulatory framework for STRA, which requires compliance with the relevant planning framework and fire safety standards, and registering properties using a government run STRA register.

Addressing demand for housing and associated needs of workers will provide safe, secure, and suitable housing while also contributing to the economic growth of towns, particularly those near large investment projects. Short-term accommodation can provide legacy infrastructure or be adapted into alternative uses such as tourism accommodation or low-cost housing for vulnerable people, as demand for accommodation fluctuates. This may also provide opportunities for growth of towns in the medium to long term and reduce pressure on social and affordable housing provision.

Strategic and statutory planning can go part of the way towards facilitating and guiding investment in short-term and temporary accommodation. We also need a coordinated approach from all levels of government to understand and appropriately manage the accommodation needs of the workforce.

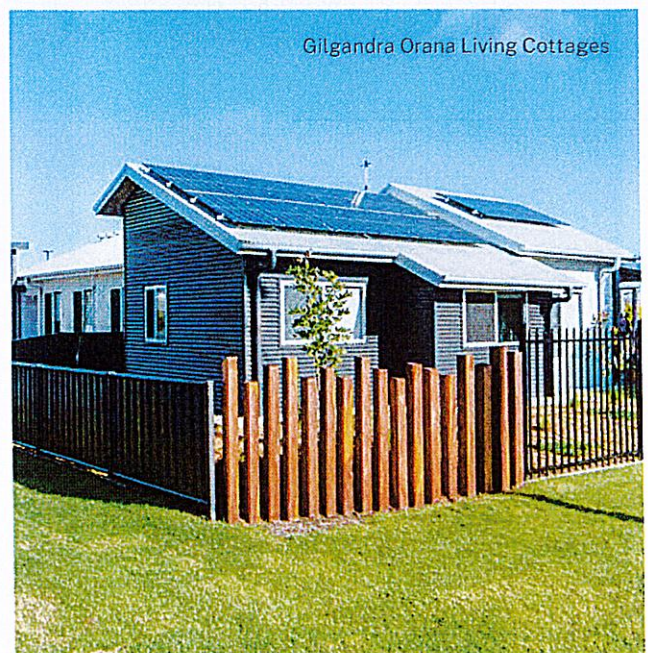
Councils need to ensure a variety of housing types, particularly in areas accessible to construction projects and areas which will be the focus of ongoing employment.

Strategy 16.1



Strategic and statutory planning should consider:

- the provision of housing for workers by employers, including state agencies, by providing flexible controls
- the capacity of existing and planned infrastructure to service accommodation for workers
- provision for workers' accommodation sites such as caravan parks, manufactured home estates, tiny homes and manufactured homes on land in or adjoining existing centres, new development areas and publicly owned land.





A worker drives a fork lift with packages in Blayney

Strategy 16.2



Development applications for large-scale projects should be supported by a workforce accommodation strategy that:

- assesses anticipated impacts on the local housing market, including cumulative impacts associated with other large scale projects in the area
- shows how potential employees can access accommodation, without detrimentally affecting existing housing availability and affordability
- illustrates how the project will contribute to the supply of local housing, and support the nearest centre or centres
- allows for the plan to be monitored and updated over the life of the project.

Action 3



The department will prepare and release guidance to help councils plan for accommodation options for workforce accommodation.

Collaboration Activity 22



The department will work with:

- the Department of Regional NSW, joint organisations, relevant public authorities and councils to identify and quantify potential housing demands from projects to 2027, including mining, renewable energy and transmission projects, road and rail infrastructure projects
- councils to review LEPs to facilitate accommodation for workers associated with major projects.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION