

**Submission
No 54**

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC TOILETS

Organisation: AILA - Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

Date Received: 29 November 2024



28/11/2024

Attention:

Amanda Cohn

The Director, Inquiry into Public Toilets,
Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

PortfolioCommittee8@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Amanda Cohn,

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS (AILA)

Submission to the Parliament of NSW Inquiry into public toilets

STATEMENT

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) thank the Parliament of NSW for establishing an inquiry into public toilets. Public toilets are essential infrastructure which forms part of the global framework of human rights to water and sanitation. Accessible and inclusive public toilets promote health and enable people to engage in public spaces and community life.

ABOUT US

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) is the peak national body for Landscape Architecture. AILA champions quality design for public open spaces, stronger communities, and greater environmental stewardship. We provide our members with training, recognition, and a community of practice, to share knowledge, ideas and action. With our members, we anticipate and develop a leading position on issues of concern in landscape architecture. Alongside government and allied professions, we work to improve the design and planning of the natural and built environment.

In operation since 1966, AILA represents over 3,500 landscape architects and promotes excellence in planning, design and management for life outdoors. Committed to designing and creating better spaces in Australia, landscape architects have the skills and expertise to improve the nation's liveability through a unique approach to planning issues via innovative integrated solutions. In doing so, landscape architects contribute towards better environmental, social and economic outcomes for all Australians.

The work of landscape architects is recognised for creating liveable cities and sustainable design outcomes for everyone, our members help shape many projects across Australia, creating the vibrant community spaces for all.



We believe that AILA, through its advocacy, will significantly contribute to a better-informed urban development decision-making process, the enhancement of our urban greenspaces and long-term community wellbeing.

WHY DO PUBLIC TOILETS MATTER?

Public toilets are essential infrastructure that everyone needs, regardless of where they are from, their age, gender, ability or cultural background.

However, in many places, if these facilities are provided, they are often poorly designed or inconveniently located, leading people to avoid using them. Public toilets are sometimes perceived as unsafe or are kept locked rather than being accessible 24/7, which contributes to their limited use by everyone. Public toilets in a public space are often treated as a maintenance and operational liability rather than a fundamental human right.

If someone cannot find, access or use a public toilet, it limits their ability to use public spaces fully and participate in community activities, affecting their full engagement as a citizen.

CURRENT STATE OF PUBLIC TOILETS IN NSW

The National Public Toilet Map currently provides detailed information on existing public toilet locations, accessibility features and hours of use across NSW and Australia.

These public toilets are planned, designed, delivered and managed by different authorities:

- **Local Government:** Public toilets near the community facilities such as libraries, parks, sportsgrounds, and central business districts are usually managed by local councils.
- **NSW Government:** Toilets at key locations like train stations, bus interchanges, ferry terminals, national parks, beaches, highways, rest areas, and tourist attractions are typically managed by the NSW Government.
- **Private Owners:** Public toilets in shopping malls and retail precincts are generally managed by private property owners.

Landscape architects play a vital role in designing and delivering public spaces across NSW, Australia and internationally by ensuring public toilets are well integrated and sited into the broader design of urban and open spaces, enhancing accessibility, functionality, and the overall experience for the public.

CURRENT CHALLENGES IN PUBLIC TOILET PROVISION AND MAINTENANCE

- **Lack of legislation or policy:** There is currently no legal requirement or policy on provision and access to public toilets across NSW. The legislation should include provision and access to public toilets as a human right, promoting inclusion and dignity for all.



- **Absence of NSW wide public toilet strategy:** At present, there is no overarching strategy for the equitable distribution of public toilets across NSW including rural areas, high-demand urban areas or key tourist destinations.
 - While some local councils, such as City of Sydney, Inner West Council and Eurobodalla Council have developed their own public toilet strategies, these are limited to their respective local government areas. New South Wales currently lacks a comprehensive public toilet framework that provides guidelines and strategies for the planning, design, delivery and maintenance of public toilets, as well as clarifies the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government and private owners.
 - There is also no advocacy or guidance on key issues such as the importance of public toilets, their economic value (balancing risks and rewards), demand analysis, equitable access, design principles, maintenance standards, community engagement or ongoing monitoring and evaluation.
- **No guidance on provision ratio:** The absence of standards for the number of public toilets needed per population, workers, students or visitors, leads to inconsistent availability of public toilets across NSW, making access unequal for residents, workers and visitors.
- **Absence of specific public toilet design standard:** The current standards for public toilets are based on broad building standards, guidelines and user needs. These need urgent review and updating to reflect advancements in accessibility, technology, gender inclusivity and other community expectations. There is also a need to integrate renewable energy and water-saving features in public toilet designs to align with the NSW Government's sustainability goals. There is currently no specific Australian Standard for public toilets.
 - A Changing Places toilet facility design currently accommodates people with high support needs to participate in all elements of community life. However, they come with significant funding challenges to deliver and maintain.
- **Funding gaps:** There is no dedicated funding or grant funding model at local, state or federal government levels to ensure public toilets are provided, well-designed, maintained and free for community use 24/7.
- **Operational and maintenance challenges:** Cleaning and maintaining public toilets is a significant challenge, particularly in high-use areas with a growing population, workers and visitors. For example, tourist destinations, like the Blue Mountains City Council, face additional challenges during peak seasons. Fast-growing councils in Western Sydney, face significant funding challenges to upgrade existing or provide new public toilets to meet current community needs and allocate operational resources towards the existing and new public toilets to ensure they are safe, clean, accessible, inclusive and welcoming to community.



- **Lack of maintenance standards and enforcement:** Few instances of recorded vandalism and antisocial behaviour in and around public toilets have led to some public toilets being locked to prevent misuse, however this further limit public access. Clear hygiene standards, enforcement and better maintenance practices/ standards are currently missing.
- **Community education and awareness:** There is a lack of strong public education and awareness campaigns encouraging good hygiene habits. These initiatives are critical for ensuring the upkeep and respectful use of public toilet facilities.

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT

- **Participate in NSW wide public toilet strategy:** We have extensive experience in creating state-wide strategies and offering detailed design advice for public toilet facilities in public spaces. We are keen to participate in a taskforce or advisory group, if one is formed, to help develop a state-wide public toilet strategy for NSW, ensuring that the facilities are equitable, functional, accessible, inclusive, welcoming, and sustainable.
- **Design expertise and guidance:** We specialise in site selection and placement, accessibility, inclusivity, design integration, sustainability, and community engagement. This will assist and ensure that public toilets are fairly distributed and well-integrated into public spaces.
- **Guidance on best practice public toilets integrated into public space:** We offer expertise in designing public toilets that blend seamlessly into public spaces. The notable examples led by landscape architects include Barangaroo Reserve, Sydney, Rottnest Island, Western Australia, Central Park, Melbourne, High Line Park, New York, and the Tokyo Toilet Project, Japan.

CONCLUSION

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) has the required expertise to identify policy gaps, develop strategy and frameworks, develop design principles, standards, and guidance, focussing on public toilets within public spaces. We are keen to assist NSW Government lead the way in providing public toilets that champions equity, functionality, accessibility and sustainability, ensuring public toilets meet the needs of all communities.

Sincerely yours,

David Moir

AILA NSW President

SUBMISSION TEAM: Sarika Shasidharan, Ingrid Mather

