

**SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENT PANEL DRAFT ADVISORY PAPER**  
**FOR THE GREATER SYDNEY COMMISSION**  
**13 October 2016**

## About the Environment Panel

In line with the Greater Sydney Commission's (GSC) commitment to "engage thoroughly, consistently and transparently with the community, local government and state agencies", and at the suggestion of Total Environment Centre, the GSC established the Environment Panel, which comprises of representatives from peak key bodies, community groups and academic organisations.

The role of this group is to provide policy input to help inform the drafting of the District Plans by:

- Providing their advice on strategic environmental priorities in relation to metro and district planning;
- Provide, among others, an effective conduit for communication between the GSC and the community's environmental concerns; and
- To capture both the Panel's advice and the priorities of the community relative to each district in an Advisory Paper.

## About the Greater Sydney Commission

The Greater Sydney Commission is leading metropolitan planning for the Greater Sydney Region and is working with government, business and members of the community to make sure Sydney remains liveable, productive and sustainable as it grows.

A Plan for Growing Sydney sets the top level goals to guide the growth and development of Sydney. The metropolitan goals include planning for:

- A competitive economy with world-class services and transport
- A city of housing choice, with homes that meet our needs and lifestyles
- A great place to live with communities that are strong, healthy and well connected
- A sustainable and resilient city that protects the natural environment and has a balanced approach to the use of land and resources.

The Greater Sydney Commission has been formed to coordinate the way that government, business and the community address the challenge of planning for growth and new technologies, and to guide and direct planning for the future so we can have an active, productive, liveable, sustainable and resilient city.

Planning is happening at two levels. The State Government has developed overarching plans (for example 'A Plan for Growing Sydney') for how to accommodate the growing population and the jobs and transport we need. Local councils have developed Local Environmental Plans to identify what land can be used for, including housing, business and parks.

What has been missing is district level planning that connects local planning with the longer term metropolitan planning for Greater Sydney. Districts represent neighbouring groups of council areas with similar features and shared objectives. District Plans will be the bridge between strategic planning and on-the-ground local planning.

## Summary of the Environment Panel’s Key Environmental Issues for Sydney

The members of the Environment Panel believe that the natural and built environments of Sydney have not been given an adequate level of consideration in previous planning processes; and that greater effort needs to be made to operationalise ecologically sustainable development in planning.

The Panel has identified 14 key environmental issues that should be addressed in the District Plans for the Greater Sydney area; and recommended a range of metrics that can be used to set benchmarks and test the performance of District Plans.

The environmental issues address ecosystem, social and economic implications recognising that cities not only impact their physical location but also the wider environment through their use of energy and water and disposal of waste.

<p><b>1 Waterways</b></p>	<p>The waterways of Greater Sydney (rivers, creeks and ocean) are vital environmental assets. However, multiple point discharge, terrestrial runoff and aging storm water infrastructure are an ever increasing challenge for the quality of our waterways, the biota and recreational activity they support, especially with the additional pressures from increasing development.</p> <p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coast to catchment management.</li> <li>• Improved management of stormwater and terrestrial run-off.</li> <li>• Integrated government planning processes (through Coastal Reform legislation, MEMA, and GSC processes).</li> <li>• Comprehensive and modern approaches to monitoring ecosystem health.</li> <li>• On ground works for healthy coasts and waterways including habitat restoration and building marine infrastructure.</li> <li>• Land use planning for coasts and waterways including the reviewing of relevant SEPPs and the Harbour specific Environmental Plan.</li> <li>• Improving water quality and reducing marine litter through a wide range of initiatives such as implementing works and programs to address catchment runoff and water pollution source reduction, setting targets and monitoring, as well as community education and research.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2 Biodiversity</b></p>	<p>Greater Sydney includes some of the most critically endangered wildlife, plants and ecological communities in NSW. The unique biodiversity inside the urban boundaries is severely depleted and bushland continues to be removed. It is important to understand and retain what is remaining and improve wildlife habitats and corridors.</p>

	<p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map and retain remaining biodiversity areas.</li> <li>• Establish a Green Grid Open Space Trust with statutory authority to acquire and manage land that has significant biodiversity values</li> <li>• Improve and extend wildlife habitats and corridors.</li> <li>• Impose 'like for like' where offsets are used and avoid diluting offsets.</li> <li>• Prioritise invasive species management.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3 Open space</b></p>	<p>The citizens of Sydney highly value the green spaces near their homes and the access to major regional parklands. With population growth and increased urban density, existing open space must be retained and improved with an investment in upgraded facilities, and new open space will need to be provided.</p> <p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extend and improve a network of open spaces including parks, reserves, waterways and local streets.</li> <li>• Analyse spatial distribution of open space requirement against existing open space capacity and identify any shortfalls that may exist.</li> <li>• Prepare a program of facilities and opportunities to be provided in the open spaces across the Precinct.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4 Urban trees</b></p>	<p>Urban tree cover is being reduced. Canopy loss is most pronounced in peri-urban areas undergoing rapid densification, urban density infill with the loss of gardens where house to land ratios are high as well as due to major infrastructure projects. The evidence is overwhelming that urban trees provide multiple environmental, social and economic benefits including alleviating the urban heat island problem. The real value of urban trees needs to be determined, which will allow more informed decision making about investing in new tree planting as well as proposals to remove existing trees.</p> <p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor and increase urban tree cover across the districts.</li> <li>• Actively manage long term planning for Sydney's urban trees.</li> <li>• Set targets for urban tree cover on a district basis and implement at precinct level.</li> <li>• Encourage and support community volunteer groups to engage in planting and maintaining urban trees.</li> </ul>

<p><b>5 Local character</b></p>	<p>The local character of an area - its buildings, vegetation and public spaces give people a sense of place or identity as well as to the history of their suburb. It is vital that local character be valued and maintained in consultation with the community.</p> <p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement town character preservation principles in LEPs and smart growth strategies.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6 Heritage</b></p>	<p>Heritage are the things that give a sense of history, distinctiveness and identity to a place that we value today and want to keep for future generations to learn from, appreciate and enjoy. It is vital that heritage Listed Items and Heritage Conservation Areas should be protected from demolition and inappropriate development.</p> <p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Across Greater Sydney, heritage listed items and Heritage Conservation Areas should be protected from demolition and inappropriate development.</li> <li>• District Plans should actively seek to identify, recognize and protect heritage items and Heritage Conservation Areas from demolition and/or inappropriate development.</li> <li>• Development objectives should strive to protect and enhance the individual heritage values of localities within the overall area.</li> <li>• Development objectives should aim to create and maintain locally distinctive urban characters in new development zones.</li> </ul>
<p><b>7 Scenic protection</b></p>	<p>The beauty of Sydney’s beaches, valleys, waterways, wetlands, forests, parks and farmland are socially and economically important. It is important that items or areas with high scenic amenity are properly identified and protected from impacts of development.</p> <p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify high scenic amenity areas informing regional and local planning and decision making, including how and where prominent developments and infrastructure are permitted.</li> <li>• Maintain public access to significant and popular viewpoints and protect important views and view-lines from intrusive development.</li> <li>• Statutory recognition and protection for ‘nominated’ items of scenic value.</li> <li>• Incorporation of scenic value impact analyses in all relevant planning decisions at all levels.</li> </ul>

<p><b>8 Air quality</b></p>	<p>Air quality in Sydney has, on multiple days each year, surpassed harmful levels under both national and international standards. This is especially true in relation to ozone and fine particles. A key factor in improving air quality is reducing vehicle dependence by providing high quality, and accessible public transport, reducing pollution from industry, commercial and domestic sources as well as tree planting near busy roads.</p> <p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District plans should be designed to reduce reliance on private vehicle use and increase opportunities for walking and cycling.</li> <li>• Provide incentives to replace wood heaters with cleaner alternatives. Prohibit wood heaters in new developments.</li> <li>• Expand air quality monitoring.</li> </ul>
<p><b>9 Waste management</b></p>	<p>The recirculation of ‘waste’ resources into the economy is a vital sustainability practice. In addition to saving raw materials, removing and re-using waste streams will reduce pressure on dwindling landfill space, and prevent toxic chemicals from entering the waste stream. There is a need for best practice infrastructure and programs to cater for the reduction, re-using, recycling or proper safe disposal of waste.</p> <p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid new major landfill and waste to energy.</li> <li>• Facilitate waste reduction and resource efficiency via effective regulation and extended producer responsibility.</li> <li>• Public education and convenient recycling opportunities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>10 Climate Change</b></p>	<p>The Panel recognises that cities are a major driver of climate change and will suffer dangerous temperature rises, sea-level rise and severe weather events unless CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions are curtailed. Amongst other actions the Panel recommends the decarbonisation of the energy sector with a target of zero emissions by 2050.</p> <p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in the decarbonisation of the energy sector with a target of zero emissions by 2050.</li> <li>• Introduce low-emission technology and support investment in/uptake of renewable energy.</li> <li>• Implementing planning measures that encourage more sustainable transport patterns.</li> </ul>
<p><b>11 Electricity supply &amp; energy efficiency</b></p>	<p>Sydney’s households and businesses place significant pressure on the environment through their use of energy. Emission reduction is highly achievable both by investing in and supporting how energy is generated, supplied and used.</p>

	<p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All future investment in energy infrastructure must be planned towards a rapid decarbonisation of the electricity grid.</li> <li>• Encourage consumer installed photovoltaics.</li> <li>• Adopt energy savings targets and actively manage, track, and communicate energy performance.</li> <li>• Support advanced energy retrofits for existing buildings.</li> <li>• Support the installation of high efficiency LED street lights and other public lighting.</li> </ul>
<p><b>12 Water supply &amp; water efficiency</b></p>	<p>Water supply and its disposal has remained largely unchanged for several decades. There is very little recycling and re-use of wastewater or storm water. There is an urgent need to invest in storm/waste water capture, treatment and reuse systems. The adoption of water-sensitive urban design (WSUD) measures at a building, district and regional scale is recommended, as well as improving standards for existing and new buildings in relation to water capture, recycling/reuse and efficiency.</p> <p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in storm/waste water capture, treatment and reuse systems including adoption of water-sensitive design measures at a building, district and regional scale.</li> <li>• Increase standards for existing and new buildings in relation to water capture, recycling/reuse as efficiency.</li> </ul>
<p><b>13 Natural hazards</b></p>	<p>Greater Sydney faces a number of natural hazards such as heatwaves, bushfires, storms, flooding and drought. Most are predicted to become more severe and frequent as a result of global warming. It is important that the city, its buildings and infrastructure consider the importance of climate change adaption to ‘accommodate’ for natural hazards by designing-in resilience.</p> <p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in policies, programs and infrastructure that will ensure adequate preparedness for, and mitigation of, the impacts of natural hazards recognising their potential to become more severe and frequent with the advance of climate change.</li> <li>• Implementation of “best practice” disaster recovery strategies when responding to the impacts of natural hazards.</li> </ul>

<p><b>14 Peri urban areas</b></p>	<p>Peripheral (peri-) urban areas are the interface between our cities and rural areas, comprising of urban, residential, semi-rural agricultural and biodiversity areas. They are highly contested with a growing population as Sydney expands and are vulnerable to being subsumed for housing and infrastructure. These areas contain valuable natural assets and significant landscapes that are important for recreation and tourism, as well as being a source of productive agricultural land with economic and employment value. There is a need to consider this land for its own value and; as sites to restore biodiversity - and not just land in waiting for urban development.</p> <p>Some possible solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement a Peri Urban lands strategy for the district and protect the functions and values of critical areas.</li> <li>• Map fertile soil areas and designate and protect natural resource land.</li> <li>• Define the edge of the city by defining the urban growth boundary</li> <li>• Preserve non-urban breaks between towns, ensuring dwelling development and subdivision.</li> <li>• Maintain green belts and green wedges.</li> <li>• Develop a Greater Sydney Agriculture Lands Protection Act or an equivalent SEPP.</li> <li>• Protect natural areas which contribute to biodiversity and the environmental health of the city.</li> <li>• Promote multifunctional land use where farming can be combined with other compatible land uses such as providing recreational and educational services to urban citizens. Land may also be used as water storage areas, fire break zones, and flood zones.</li> </ul>
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