

4 August 2020

Submission in response to the NSW Productivity Commission's Review of Infrastructure Contributions in New South Wales

About the New South Wales Public Libraries Association (NSWPLA)

- NSWPLA is the peak body for public libraries across NSW. The role of the Association is to:
- Advocate and lobby for the NSW public library network
- Initiate strategic partnerships
- Champion the public library cause
- Build trust and support
- Provide relevant information
- Foster cooperation and collaboration
- Strengthen the public library network

Membership to the Association is open to all Local Government Councils in NSW that have adopted the NSW Library Act 1939. The Association currently has 100% membership of NSW Councils, which provides a clear imprimatur for NSWPLA to represent the interests of NSW libraries as their recognised peak body.

Public Libraries in NSW

There are currently 363 public libraries and 23 mobile libraries in NSW.

In 2018-19 there were:

- 2,356 staff employed in NSW libraries
- 3.2 million library members
- 34 million visits
- 40.3 million loans
- 12.1 million visits to library websites
- 3.4 million internet sessions and 6.6 million wifi sessions
- 95,600 programs and event attended by 1.9 million people

Public libraries provide important community spaces where a significant proportion of NSW constituents attend for a wide variety of reasons including education, recreation, entertainment, and social integration.

Libraries provide physical and social focal points for their communities and make a significant contribution to prosperity and wellbeing of constituents. From a physical perspective, library buildings are often architectural landmarks and centrepieces of greenfield developments that make a significant contribution to the liveability of towns and cities. Investment in libraries is investment in communities.

Despite the closure of libraries across the state during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown period, libraries very successfully reinvented their services to meet the changed circumstances. Nevertheless, a post-lockdown survey conducted with library members across Australia by the Australian Library and Information Association revealed that the loss of social interaction that libraries provide was one of the biggest impacts felt by communities.



NSW Infrastructure Contributions and Library Buildings

There is a clear and demonstrated need for public library buildings in NSW. State government contributions to the provision of NSW public library buildings and services dropped from 23.6% in 1980 to just 7.8% in 2018-19. Effective lobbying by NSWPLA saw and injection of an additional \$60m for NSW libraries over the quadrennial period 2019-20 to 2023, providing a 12% contribution by state government to the total operating costs of NSW libraries.

Local infrastructure contributions in NSW are currently capped at \$30,000 per dwelling or residential lot in greenfield areas and \$20,000 in infill areas. If councils seek to go above these caps, they can only do so if the uses are included on the essential works list. The current Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) Essential Works list includes the land for library and community facilities but not the buildings themselves. This is a significant impediment to the funding of new facilities, especially in disadvantaged areas.

By easing restrictions on contributions for facilities, the current Review of Infrastructure Contributions in New South Wales could support the provision of a broad range of community amenities. This would strengthen the capacity of new communities by offering offer access to a range of services enjoyed by residents of established neighbourhoods. As previously noted in this submission, libraries provide established community hubs where community members come together for a broad range of educational, recreational and social activities, resources and spaces.

Recommendation

NSWPLA implores the Review of Infrastructure Contributions in New South Wales to recognise the limitations that current contribution caps place on the community development, particularly the negative impact on investment in library and other community buildings.

We ask the panel to recommend that the NSW Government allow community services buildings to be funded under Section 7.11 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, where contributions exceed the caps of \$30,000/\$20,000 per lot or dwelling, and to amend the DPIE Essential Works list to include community services buildings.

