

National Draft Urban Policy

Submission by the Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue

June 2024

Executive Summary

The Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue (The Dialogue) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Australian Government's *National Urban Policy – Consultation Draft* (the Draft Policy) released in May 2024.

The Dialogue supports cities that are livable, equitable, productive, sustainable and resilient. As Western Sydney is a growing city facing a range of environmental, economic, and livability challenges, we welcome the ambition of First Ministers to develop a national approach to sustainable cities growth through a National Urban Policy. We endorse the six principles proposed to underpin the Draft Policy.

Using data from the Dialogue's recently published inaugural [Greater Western Sydney Community Wellbeing Survey](#), we illustrate the need for the Commonwealth to once again take a leading role in building sustainable cities in the tradition of Whitlam, Rudd and Turnbull. We submit Western Sydney as an exemplar that would benefit from a national urban policy, and which serves as an example for other fast-growing urban communities around the country.

About the Dialogue

The Dialogue is a not-for-profit, community initiative leading a national conversation about Greater Western Sydney. The Dialogue facilitates interaction between key opinion leaders, across industry, government, academia and the community, to inform public policy debate and to advance a Western Sydney regional agenda through research, analysis, advocacy & events, and has been leading those conversations for almost a decade.

Since its inception, the Dialogue has advocated for sensible and equitable infrastructure for the residents of GWS, of which the Western Sydney International Airport is one of the most transformational. The Dialogue has always been a vocal proponent of projects and policies that provide residents with better opportunities for employment, services and amenities, including those which enhance their lives, such as establishing recreational water spaces, developing health and education hubs, and increasing community and social housing.

The Dialogue's work in and advocacy for Western Sydney affirms the direction and intent of the National Urban Policy, and in its recognition of the critical role of all three levels of government, the private sector and communities in working together to achieve sustainable outcomes.

About the Region

Greater Western Sydney includes highly urbanised and peri-urban communities. With 2.7 million residents, Western Sydney accounts for more than half of Greater Sydney's population and approximately 10% of Australia's population. The region is also home to the largest Indigenous population in Australia.

It is the third largest economy in Australia.

It consists of 13 Local Government Areas: Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Parramatta, Penrith, The Hills and Wollondilly.

As a region within a capital city, Western Sydney is often not considered separately which can limit its evolution and development. For example, the City of Parramatta does not have the same status under NSW Local Government legislation as the City of Sydney which limits its capacity as a civic and business centre for the region. The Dialogue believes that the City of Parramatta should be elevated to Principal CBD status alongside the City of Sydney, including a directly elected Lord Mayor, abolition of wards, and a City of Parramatta Planning Committee with development consent powers shared between the council and NSW Government¹.

The well-being priorities of the communities of Western Sydney

The Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue, in conjunction with the RPS Group has recently published data from our Wellbeing Survey.

Drawing from the Commonwealth's framework and work undertaken by the UK's Office of National Statistics, the survey canvassed 609 residents of Western Sydney on the relative criticality of various wellbeing factors. It also asked respondents to assess their own wellbeing using an instrument developed by the Dialogue and its research partners, the RPS Group.

The survey's findings support the focus areas and principles outlined in the Commonwealth's Draft Policy.

The GWS Community Wellbeing Survey Report² key findings revealed:

- 7 out of 10 GWS residents are mostly or completely satisfied with their local area
- Access to quality healthcare and support services consistently ranks in the top five priority group for every demographic group surveyed
- Access to housing was rated as the #4 Wellbeing priority
- Access to good quality natural environments rates in the top 5 priorities of almost every demographic group surveyed

¹ [WSLD Strengthening-Local-Government-Paper \(2024\)](#)

² [WSLD+RPS_CIS-Report summary \(2024\)](#)

Australian Government Objectives: Areas of Focus

The Dialogue supports each of these areas of focus, highlighting Western Sydney context.

No-one and no place left behind

The availability of services and facilities across Western Sydney is not uniform and there are significant pockets of disadvantage within the region and its sub-regions where communities are being left behind.

The availability of sufficient and suitable housing that serves families and communities remains a key priority in Western Sydney, including the provision of social and affordable housing.³ Given Western Sydney's role in supporting growing populations the need to align population and infrastructure remains key. The Dialogue also supports creating that growth through a combination of infill and greenfield developments.

Greenfield developments specifically require concurrent public transport. The Dialogue has for instance recently highlighted in a submission to a NSW Parliament inquiry the deficit of public transport (and specifically bus) services to support residents in the growing suburban and peri-urban communities on the edges of the region.

All people belong and are welcome

Western Sydney is home to many Indigenous Australians, and people from across the globe – with over 45% of people speaking a language other than English at home.

60% of participants completely or mostly agreed that they feel a sense of belonging (to place, family, friends). This was highest in those over 70 years old. This result may in part reflect those older individuals, even if they have come to Australia with no family, have established a sense of community in following years.

Local Governments across the region have sought to develop programs and activities which embrace cultural and other diversity, as part of strategies which also support nighttime economy and tourism. These strategies and programs are critical in support of belonging, identity and social cohesion.

Local Governments in Western Sydney are also focused in delivering infrastructure to support physical activity and recreation in which they require support from both the Commonwealth and State governments. Within our Community Insights Survey, females for instance, indicated that access to infrastructure to support my health was #5 in their top priorities.

A 2023 study by Dialogue partner Western Sydney University found that Western Sydney attracted only 3.4% Commonwealth arts funding between 2015-2023. It received only 1.7% of the \$200 million of [RISE funding](#) (which was part of the Commonwealth's COVID-19 Creative Economy support package). Despite being part of Greater Sydney, Western Sydney's access to arts and cultural experiences is limited, both in terms of frequency and diversity.

³ [Deloitte for WSLD Commonwealth Social and Affordable Housing Policy Review \(2021\)](#); [WSLD Housing Response \(2022\)](#)

Our urban areas are safe

Feeling safe at home, school/work and in public spaces was highly rated in the Community Wellbeing Survey and was the #1 Wellbeing Priority for women and #2 overall and consequently we strongly endorse this being identified as an important area of focus. Feeling safe, including having access to secure housing supports residents having the capacity to engage in wider employment, wellbeing, and community activities.

The Dialogue would concur that safety is also experienced at a community level, as well as in the context of individuals. Heat and flood events which have adversely affected the urban communities in Western Sydney and will continue to require strong planning to reduce risks as well as to respond to crises that will affect our communities in the future⁴. In that 2019 paper, the Dialogue highlighted that to keep our suburbs cooler we will need to: green our local communities, water our local communities, plan for natural urban cooling and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Our urban areas are sustainable

As an urban area experiencing population growth and significant construction activity, Western Sydney remains conscious of climate change. The Dialogue notes the importance of planning to limit the impact of heat and other climate related challenges included floods and bushfires, recognizing that many of the urban areas in Western Sydney are fortunate to have strong blue-green surroundings.

The Dialogue has been a strong advocate for public transport services across the region. Not only is this an equity and access issue, reducing reliance on private transport would also have a positive impact on energy consumption, air quality, and local congestion.

Energy usage and consumption is perhaps the most pressing element for sustainability. The Dialogue therefore supports the importance of this focus area, with a strong focus and support of renewal energy developments, as well as effective management of energy and water supplies.

Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing

Western Sydney is fortunate to have some very large open spaces, including the Western Sydney Parklands, Penrith Lakes, Parramatta Park, Georges River National Park, Sydney Olympic Park, the Australian Botanic Garden at Mount Annan and the Blue Mountains.

Access to good quality natural environments ranked in the top five priorities in the Community Wellbeing survey of almost every demographic group surveyed. Residents value both natural environments as well as built environment facilities for physical activity and recreation. As noted above infrastructure to support health was highly rated, particularly by women as a separate element to access to quality healthcare services.

However, while access to these natural environments is well regarded, access to spaces closer to home remains of particular importance. This became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when residents were restricted from using playgrounds and other communal facilities. A mix of these natural and planned urban environments are being used by communities across the region for active recreation through community managed activities such as Park Run.

⁴ [WSLD_Greater Western Sydney's Hot Issue \(2019\)](#)

Our urban areas promote productivity

There is a jobs deficit across the Western Sydney region, despite having an increasingly well educated and highly skilled workforce. Many residents travel at significant length to access employment opportunities, especially those in professional services and other white collar roles. The growth of Parramatta within Western Sydney has started to reframe employment opportunities, but the distances from Parramatta to some other parts of Western Sydney are as much as the distances between Central Sydney and those locations.

With the imminent opening of the Western Sydney International Airport, the importance of ensuring that land use planning effectively responds to freight, including urban freight requirements has become evident. Western Sydney is already home to the National Intermodal at Moorebank, with rail connection to Port Botany and in time urban growth across Greater Sydney will require the expansion of the city's freight rail network through to Port Kembla and to the Western Sydney Aerotropolis employment area.

In addition to these state and national level facilities, one of the important urban planning challenges will continue in responding to servicing local needs particularly with burgeoning e-commerce requirements. Balancing the preservation, adaptation and upgrading of employment lands across Western Sydney, promoting increased advanced manufacturing, range of warehousing size capabilities with the concurrent planning of connectivity of transport corridors for people and freight.

Principles

The Dialogue also supports the listed principles being applied within the National Policy.

City planning and governance must be collaborative and adaptive	✓
Purposeful placemaking increases wellbeing and connection	✓
Urban development should actively improve social, environmental and economic outcomes	✓
Improving the evidence base will underpin urban innovation	✓
Fair and inclusive development builds equitable communities	✓
Fostering innovation and creativity hubs enhance diversity and broadens opportunities	✓

Conclusion

The Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue welcomes and endorses the areas of focus and principles underpinning the Draft National Urban Policy.

It affirms the direction and intent of the National Urban Policy, and in its recognition of the critical role of all three levels of government, the private sector and communities in working together to achieve sustainable outcomes.

The Dialogue would be pleased to provide any further advice to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and the Arts as may be helpful, including a detailed briefing on the results of the GWS Wellbeing Survey referred to above.